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CO-OPERATION IN SCHOOL ADMINISTRATION¹

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In speaking of co-operation in administration it is perhaps unnecessary to state that I have in mind co-operation within a given system and not co-operation between different systems. There are two extreme types of school administration, the one mechanical in form and autocratic in process and practice, the other intelligent in form and co-operative in spirit and practice. We can better understand the latter, about which we are especially to speak, in contrast with the former. By the former type of administration I have in mind an organization in which everyone concerned, teachers, principals, supervisors, superintendent, has his own place and his own responsibility very definitely and carefully defined. Everyone, recognizing his own place and responsibility, tries to keep within it; everyone feels that he has a certain function to perform and he has the responsibility and the right to perform it as he sees fit, but that no one else who has another function has any right to interfere directly or indirectly by

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suggestion or otherwise. In this mechanical and autocratic system any interference is taken as a personal matter, a personal affront, a personal criticism. The mechanical system is a personal, isolated system. It is made up of a number of unrelated units; it is an aggregation of people brought together to do, in accordance with the mechanical plan laid out, a certain piece of work. It is in sharp contrast with an intelligently organized system which is made up of a body of people brought together as an organism, if you please, inter-related and co-ordinated for the purpose of doing together a piece of vital work.

The contrasting spirit of two such extreme types of organization can perhaps be illustrated by the different methods of giving directions employed by the two types of administrators. "Do this; do it in this way," says the administrator in the mechanical system; or, if he is extremely liberal in his views, "Do it in any way you please, but do it." In contrast an administrator of the co-operative type would say, "Here is a piece of work to be done; we have it to do together; let us find out the best way to do it; as administrator it is my function to suggest; I suggest that it be done thus, but what do you suggest? Try it out and we will modify our way as experience indicates it should be modified." The teacher will be perfectly free to come to the superintendent and suggest that the plan of operation may be improved or even to improve it without any further conference.

The advantages, if there are advantages in the mechanical form of organization, are the apparent certainty and the accompanying feeling of certainty about the distribution of responsibility. Perhaps it is a human characteristic to want to know exactly what is expected of me and when a specific task is assigned I will faithfully perform my duties. The disadvantages are the disadvantages that come from isolation, from working alone, because that is what it really means.

We are forbidden to think of things that do not immediately concern us and we are not allowed to express our thoughts about things that do not concern us.

Mechanical organization, perhaps not always of the extreme type, is in my experience the prevalent organization, at least in large school systems and very often in small school systems. There are those who maintain that in a large system it is impossible to carry out a plan of education in any other way. Much as they may deplore the fact and the unfortunate results, they are convinced that it is impossible to do otherwise. But I have never yet seen a system organized in that way with the most complete and comprehensive and clearcut plan imaginable that was really efficient in operation. There are always parts of the work and responsibilities for work to be done that fall between various persons, resulting in omissions and evasions and in the shifting of responsibilities from one to another. Very important matters are often neglected, because no one can be found who will acknowledge responsibility for them.

On the other hand, the system which I have designated as the intelligent-co-operative system is just the reverse. The advantages of such a system are numerous. First, it tends to the development of high morale throughout the system. We are hearing a good deal in these days about the importance of morale in our industrial and civic life and we are noting the steps taken to produce morale. It means common knowledge about certain things, common ideals, and common purposes. To get people working enthusiastically together is the process of producing morale. At the same time, such working and feeling and thinking together give everyone concerned the feeling of strength that comes from the consciousness that, little as one's power may be, it represents and is in collaboration with the powers of large numbers of others working for the same end.

The second advantage of the co-operative type of organization is that it tends to make available for use the wealth of experience, of knowledge, of inspiration and ideals, represented by the whole teaching force. There is no greater loss anywhere in our educational work than the loss that results from the failure to capitalize the knowledge and experience of all the people in the profession—something that cannot be done under the mechanical system. Every administrative measure has at least two phases; it is seen from two standpoints: from the standpoint of the administrator who may work it out in accordance with the best light and judgment that he has and from the standpoint of those who have to be administered, of those who have to carry it out in detail. The standpoint of both is valuable, important, essential to the working out of any plan of administration or organization. Every plan of organization, of administration, should be formulated and reformulated whenever necessary in the light of the knowledge and judgment of everyone concerned, not simply of those charged primarily with the responsibility for administration, but equally of those who are charged with carrying out administrative measures.

Thirdly, this type of administration furthers the professional education and progress of everyone concerned. This statement hardly needs any elaboration. The whole field of education is open for thought or observation, for discussion and suggestion. One is not limited to the particular place in which he primarily does his work. One is not limited to the school room. One has a right, an obligation, from his own standpoint to think and to pass judgment, and to make his judgment known, concerning any phase of the school system.

There are some cautions to be observed in attempting to carry on school administration in this free, co-operative fashion. It is more difficult to carry on the co-operative form

of administration than the mechanical form, just as it is vastly more difficult for teachers to carry out some plan of pupil self-government than it is to control by the usual disciplinary measures. Here are some of the cautions which must be observed in such a system. Ultimate responsibility for all activities should be as definitely placed and as fully assumed as in the mechanical-autocratic type of administration. That is, we should know, after all the discussion and conference and co-operation and helpfulness possible to be brought to bear on any problem, who is ultimately and primarily responsible for carrying on the work. The administration must be rigidly impersonal. The best interests of the work to be done must be the universal standard of procedure. Everyone concerned must be willing to have his actions tested and judged by this standard. It ought to be so under all systems, but it is peculiarly important under a system of co-operation that it should be rigidly impersonal. I think the greatest obstacle to professional progress is the almost universal failure to look upon our work objectively rather than as a personal matter.

What shall be the machinery of an intelligent-co-operative type of administration? Let me point out that the machinery is merely a means to an end. The important element of the situation is the co-operative spirit and purpose which are universally indispensable. That is, there must be the feeling and the desire to work together, to help one another, to perform one's own part for which one is fundamentally, ultimately responsible in such a way as to help everyone else in the performance of his particular function. As I have said, to have a co-operative system of organization work ideally, everyone must look objectively at the work. When we get into that spirit we shall welcome help from anyone rather than take it as a personal criticism if the suggestion is made that we might do it better. In other words, we

should play the whole game in the open. Why should the principal or the superintendent hesitate a moment to declare his full intention, the full extent of his knowledge and purpose, to everyone concerned? Why should he hesitate to introduce and invite suggestions and criticisms? I put myself in a perfectly impregnable position if I take an impersonal attitude. Under those conditions nothing can be said against my purposes. What I am aiming at is the best possible plan of organization and I want to find it whatever its source. It is a delicate matter to develop the right attitude on the part of members of a school system, because we are all so habituated to taking suggestions which come from people who have not the same responsibility as we have as meddling, as critical of our particular functions and of our success in discharging them. All concerned in co-operation should take the attitude at the outset of welcoming suggestions and of being grateful for them. If this can be done, we remove the element of fear and establish a spirit of confidence.

What is the best method of securing this spirit of objective co-operation? I do not know. I do not know that any machinery is necessary in a small school system. It is easily possible to produce the right atmosphere in a school system which is small enough so that everyone knows everybody else, where any group of teachers can readily be called together for conference on matters of general concern. But if no special machinery is necessary to carry on a co-operative form of administration in a small school system, the situation is different in a large school system where it is impossible for anyone to know all concerned, where those involved in the system come together so seldom that it is impossible for even those in prominent positions to get the point of view of the main body of the workers. In large systems it is absolutely necessary in my judgment to have some form of organization

that you may call machinery if you please as a means of getting the results toward which we are aiming.

The only plan that I know of which has been tried is that of organizing some form of educational council or teachers' council. Such councils have been organized in Chicago, New York, Boston, Los Angeles, Portland, and other cities. I am not going to make any attempt to speak about those, because I know them mainly only from hearsay. Only one suggestion, a weakness in all of them without exception, I think, is this, that the representatives in their councils are not representatives of the school system as a whole, but are representatives of groups of people, such as the grade school teachers, the high school teachers, the principals, or what not. Very often in order to be represented one must be a member of some purely voluntary organization. I believe a council should represent everyone in the system. At least in theory everyone in the system should have a choice in the representative to the council without belonging to any voluntary, organized group.

I want to speak a little more at length about the councils in Minneapolis and Cleveland, because I have known them intimately and have had something to do with their organization. They represent concretely the best procedure of which I have intimate knowledge and the best results, although I will not paint the results all in rosy colors, because I think I see some weaknesses that might be corrected.

The council in Minneapolis was organized nearly four years ago, in 1914. I found on going to Minneapolis—it was the first really large system with which I had anything to do as superintendent—that I was confronted with difficulty in my effort to become acquainted with a large corps, some fifteen or sixteen hundred teachers, principals, and so on, promptly enough to be able to appreciate the point of view, to appreciate the difficulties throughout the system, and to

see from the standpoint of teachers and principals any measures that might be proposed either by them or by myself for the reorganization of the system. I was casting about in my mind for some means through which I might come into closer professional contact with the people of that system when I discovered that a year or two before the teachers themselves had requested the formation of a council, in fact, had placed before the Board of Education a petition that a council of teachers should be formed. It was to be organized by voluntary groups of teachers, by the teachers' club and the grade teachers' association, and so on. The petition had been shelved or pigeonholed. Since the beginning had been made in that way, the initiative having been taken by the teachers themselves, it seemed like a good plan to take up anew the proposal made in the petition.

As a result there was worked out an educational council for the city of Minneapolis with twenty-five members representing all the teachers, principals, and supervisors in the system on a basis not exactly numerical, but something like that. There happened to be five high-school districts in the city. Each high school was represented by one teacher. The kindergarten and first two grades had one representative, the third, fourth, and fifth grades had one, and the sixth, seventh, and eighth another. There were two representatives for the special teachers and two representatives of the elementary principals and one high-school principal. I have not accounted for the full number, which was twenty-five, but I have indicated the character of the representation.

There was a constitution which was drawn up by the committees that formulated the plan. This was finally submitted to the whole teaching body and adopted by them. The council met regularly twice a year in accordance with that constitution, but as a matter of fact it held many special meetings and considered all kinds of matters. It took up

problems relating to the curriculum. It often took up petty complaints from teachers and in a very short time the fullest discussion and the frankest expression of opinion and experience were developed, much to the advantage of the council and especially to the advantage of the administrative officials of the city, because on invitation the assistant superintendents as well as the superintendent were usually present at these meetings.

It was interesting to note that in many cases the most critical and aggressive members of a given group were chosen for the council. One heard the statement that the group wanted someone who would fight for them. This was fortunate in one respect; it insured the presentation of the most diverse views, of the most critical views of the administration and the administration's procedure. So much was expected of these ultra-radicals that in a short time criticism was heard of the council, because the council was not doing anything for the teachers. The fact of the matter was that when we sat down around a table and talked things over frankly there was not very much difference of opinion; after all of us had shown our hands frankly and expressed ourselves freely we came to substantial agreement. Indeed, the weakness of that council was that its members did not always keep sufficiently in touch with their constituency. That is why the criticism developed; the constituency, not having the same opportunity that the members of the council had to understand every problem that came up from every standpoint, could not appreciate the real situation and thought that the members of the council were doing nothing for them.

The Cleveland council was organized in a little different way. There had been no effort at organizing a council in Cleveland, so I had to initiate the suggestion there myself. This I did at once when I went there and the council was worked out almost entirely by the teachers themselves. I suggested as

the most democratic method the plan that every school—there are something over one hundred—nominate one member, and from this full list a long ballot of one hundred twenty names was prepared and printed and sent throughout the whole system and every teacher marked twenty names. After the votes were collected and counted the twenty who had the highest number of votes constituted the preliminary committee. The matter was from the first in the hands of the representatives of the teachers. The preliminary committee formulated a constitution which was submitted to the teachers and was accepted almost unanimously. The constitution provided for the election of a permanent council, which in this case numbered twenty-six and was chosen almost on the basis of a mathematical computation. The constitution provides for two meetings per year in the second month of each semester. As a matter of fact, this organization, which finally was ready for its first meeting in February, held six most interesting and prolonged meetings during the year and proved to be a most helpful body to the administration. The members of this organization also profited very greatly from the meetings. Many expressions of surprise came to me from them after the first meetings that there was so much about the schools and school administration that they never dreamed of before. The same criticism, however, developed that had arisen in Minneapolis. Representatives did not keep in touch with their constituency. They realized this fact and at the end of the year tried to redeem the situation. Everything was going on so well that I think the tendency was to forget the people that they represented and, of course, the people that they represented were not so enlightened as they should have been, although a report by the secretary was sent out after every meeting. Something further than a report seems to be necessary, however.

I want to take up a few concrete illustrations of co-operation in schools. I think these will help us to see more clearly what

the real distinction is between the mechanical form of organization and the co-operative form of organization, and they may possibly serve to convince us of the advantages of the type of administration which I am advocating.

Co-operation is possible and desirable in the formulation of salary schedules. It so happened in both of these cities that it was important, as it seemed to me, to formulate new salary schedules just as soon as possible. The new schedules were therefore formulated in both cases before the councils had come into existence. If they had been in existence, the salary matter was one very important matter which would have been taken up with them. However, I came as near to it as I could through meeting in Minneapolis all the high school principals and a large body of the teachers and presenting to them the tentative plans for revised salary schedules and getting their points of view. In Cleveland I did very much the same thing. I there had the advantage of the preliminary committee, which was referred to a moment ago and, as it represented all the teachers, I asked its members to serve in the capacity in which I should have asked the council to serve if it had been in existence. I got very complete plans from the committee of the high school teachers, but not from the others. In the absence of proposals from them I presented plans which were then revised in keeping with their suggestions.

The high school principals elected of their own initiative their representative committee. They saw the deputy superintendent about their desires. They thought that their salary schedule should be increased very materially and under his encouragement decided they would send a small representative committee of their larger committee to see the superintendent. I tried to welcome them with as much cordiality as was possible, because I was really very glad indeed to see them. We had a long conference on the subject; they left their petition in my hands; I told them plainly that under the financial

conditions which seemed to exist at the time we should have very little, if any, money for increasing the salaries of high school principals, that in my judgment the high school salary schedule was comparatively higher than the grade schedule even after the increases which we could give to grade teachers. They at least respected that judgment, although it was not, of course, very pleasing. After the salary schedule had been adopted for the elementary schools I called together the whole committee to talk over a salary schedule which it had been decided should be arranged for the high schools. I wanted particularly to revise those schedules, because they were entirely inadequate, entirely unsuited to securing and holding the best service in the system and to rewarding efficiency in service. We had a very frank talk together. They insisted that they should have at least an advance that would amount to more than twice as much as the funds available would permit, but I was able to get them to look at the whole field. I said, "Here is the whole situation," and so on, and explained it to them. With one exception they all agreed that, looking at the whole field, there was really no justification in their demand. I said to them that the only condition under which I could see my way clear to recommend a salary schedule to give them the total increase for which they had asked would be to recommend at the same time the increasing of grade teachers, because it seemed to me that in any case their salaries would be proportionately higher than the salaries of the grade teachers. Fortunately it did develop that we had more funds than we expected, which was very unusual. It usually turns out that we are disappointed, but through an unexpectedly large increase in the valuation of the city, which had not been finally determined at the time I was having this conference, we had a considerable fund, about \$150,000 more than we had expected. We were then able to be exactly consistent and do what we wanted to do. We at once recommended a schedule that gave \$100,000

more to the grade teachers and were then able to add to the high school schedule as well. At every step there was the utmost frankness and freedom of discussion. I purposely concealed nothing from those who were interested, because I wanted them to conceal nothing in their attitude from me.

Another illustration of the administration of the salary schedules at Minneapolis and Cleveland can be drawn from a reference to the merit plan, which was the basis of all advances in both systems. Both schedules were merit schedules. While the merit requirement was submitted frankly and was fully discussed, I must say that I do not think it was accepted or approved. Most teachers were opposed and frankly said so. The objection of teachers to the merit plan was expressed by a superintendent who said, "Half the teachers are afraid that the judgment of their merits won't be just and the other half are afraid that the judgment of their merits will be just." There is an element of truth in that. You may ask why salary schedules with the merit element of administration were adopted if the majority were opposed. Co-operation does not mean that the administrative officers are going to do exactly what those administered wish to have done, even though they are unanimous in it. It was stated at both of these councils at the very outset that the formation of the council was purely advisory, that the council was not to administer the schools, that that was the responsibility of the superintendent, that under the existing form of organization the superintendent cannot divest himself of his responsibility. It was clearly understood that the superintendent might feel it necessary in carrying out his responsibility according to his best judgment to act absolutely in opposition to the recommendations and desires of the council. It should be understood by the council and the whole teaching force and the superintendent as well that he has a final and ultimate responsibility which he cannot dodge. I have no right to take a course that is against my best judgment, even

if the whole school system believes in a course which I cannot approve. I may be very much influenced by the fact that my judgment is in opposition to the judgment of all others to the extent that I do not pursue the course that I otherwise would, but I am responsible, nevertheless, for the course that I do advocate and have carried out. So this matter of the administration of the merit system was taken up frankly with the council. "We have a merit system," I said. "I know that you don't all accept it, but it has been adopted and it must be carried out. It is the responsibility in large measure of the superintendent and his associates to see that it is carried out in accordance with its spirit."

We had lots of suggestions, among others one that the interests of the teachers should be safeguarded, particularly those that might be unjustifiably discharged. It was urged that there be a committee of teachers to pass upon the merits of individual teachers. I raised the question of how such a committee would act. We discussed the matter for an hour or two. Finally they came to the unanimous conclusion that the teachers did not want to shoulder that responsibility; that, in fact, a committee of teachers which had time enough to investigate properly all teachers would remove themselves from the category of teachers and become something else, virtually supervisors.

The failure of the Minneapolis council to keep their constituency sufficiently informed led that constituency to feel that they were not being adequately represented; so, inasmuch as a considerable number of teachers were eliminated in one way and another from the system, the teachers felt that the council had been negligent. Some of the teachers immediately concerned felt that they were not being represented, so one day one of the organizations of teachers appointed a committee to look out for the interests and rights of teachers who were being eliminated from the system. The

committee was appointed on the motion of an intimate friend of a teacher who had not been reappointed. The teacher who had not been reappointed had a wide reputation in the system and had used every possible influence to have this committee created. It was appointed for the general purpose of looking out for the interests of teachers, but for the particular purpose of looking out for the interest of this particular teacher. Immediately when I heard about the appointment of this committee I asked the chairman to come to my office. Was it my purpose to berate that chairman? Not at all. I sent for that chairman to say that I welcomed most heartily the action that the teachers had taken; nothing could please me more. We had had some difficult cases to deal with, I wanted all the help I could get, and if they could give me any light they would have my everlasting blessing. Somewhat to the surprise of the chairman, I think, I talked over this matter with him and sought his assistance. In their own way they investigated this case and another case. They spent a long time investigating and sending questionnaires and we got an immense amount of data. We took the precaution of getting a written statement from the two teachers concerned that they approved of the investigation by this committee. The result was that every one of that committee finally stated that there was absolutely nothing to be said in defense of the teachers concerned. That is a concrete illustration of what good co-operation means and what an opposite course might mean. The other illustrations that I might give here would be of a similar nature. My experience has confirmed me in my confidence in co-operative administration. I believe we ought to welcome it; we ought to get together and study methods and means by which we may all profit by this growing desire to work together for the best things.